

Introduction

With the 2020 U.S. Census currently being conducted, another decennial tradition is set to occur in Connecticut — redrawing the state's legislative districts. Every 10 years, the Connecticut General Assembly is charged with redrawing the boundaries for the state's House of Representatives, State Senate, and congressional districts.¹ This process, known as “redistricting,” is defined in the Connecticut Constitution and is often political, as the end result could impact which party is more likely to win a given seat based on the demographics and party affiliation of the district's residents.

Q: What are districts?

A: The State of Connecticut's legislative body is called the General Assembly, and it consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate.² In accordance with the Constitution of Connecticut, the House must consist of 125 to 225 members and the Senate must consist of 30 to 50 members. All legislative districts must be contiguous.³ Currently, the General Assembly is composed of 151 House districts and 36 Senate districts.

Connecticut currently has five congressional districts and two U.S. senators. All states have two U.S. senators whose “districts” encompass the entire state they represent.⁴ Therefore, the General Assembly only needs to redraw the maps for the state's congressional districts, in addition to the state-level House and Senate districts.

Q: What is redistricting?

A: Redistricting is the process of drawing electoral district boundaries. In Connecticut, this means redrawing the boundaries for the General Assembly's legislative districts as well as those for the state's congressional districts. Additionally, the Connecticut Constitution requires redistricting to be consistent with federal constitutional standards.⁵

Q: Why does Connecticut redistrict?

A: Connecticut, just like all of the nation's states, redistricts in order to account for population changes, and to make sure legislative districts follow the “one-person, one-vote” principle established by the U.S. Supreme Court's opinion in the 1964 case of *Reynolds v. Sims*.⁶ This principle requires state electoral districts to be roughly equal in population.

The process of redistricting modifies legislative districts to account for population shifts that have occurred within the state over the previous 10 years, and to establish the number of Connecticut residents each state representative, state senator, and member of Congress will represent. Since the U.S. Census, the nation's official population count, occurs every 10 years, so too does the redistricting process.

Q: What is the redistricting process in Connecticut?

A: In Connecticut, the legislative branch is primarily responsible for redistricting, with the executive branch only providing a secretarial role, and the judicial branch only getting involved if the legislative branch fails to meet its final deadline.⁷

Initially, the General Assembly must appoint a “reapportionment committee” to “advise [it] on matters of apportionment.”⁸ The committee must consist of:

- Four members of the Senate (two designated by the Senate’s president pro tempore — the leader of the Senate’s majority party — and two from the Senate’s minority party leader); and
- Four members of the House of Representatives (two designated by the Speaker of the House — the leader of the House’s majority party — and two from the House’s minority party leader).⁹

The reapportionment committee must file a report to the House and Senate clerks, and the General Assembly is then required to adopt a redistricting plan by September 15 of that year by at least a two-thirds majority in both legislative chambers.¹⁰ Although the Connecticut Constitution does not dictate what the committee’s report must include, in 2011, the redistricting plan included statewide, town, and district maps, as well as a geography report detailing which district every block in a municipality belongs to.¹¹

If the General Assembly fails to approve a plan by September 15 of the given year, the governor must then appoint a new “commission” to “proceed to consider the alteration of districts.”¹² This new commission must consist of eight members who are designated by the legislative leadership (again, two from each caucus leader), and a ninth member who must be an elector[^] of the state and designated by the existing eight members of the commission within 30 days.¹³

The commission then has until November 30 of the given year to submit a redistricting plan to Connecticut’s secretary of the state with majority approval (at least five out of the nine commission members must approve), and the plan does not need to be approved by the full General Assembly.¹⁴ If the commission does not meet this deadline, the secretary of the state must notify the chief justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, who will then have until February 15 of the following year to either compel the commission to approve a redistricting plan, or have the Court redraw the legislative district boundaries itself.¹⁵

Q: What is the timeline for redistricting in Connecticut after the 2020 U.S. Census?

A: The Connecticut General Assembly has numerous constitutional deadlines for approving redistricting plans. In the coming year, the constitutional deadlines are as follows:

- February 15, 2021: Appointment of members to a reapportionment committee¹⁶
- September 15, 2021: Deadline for General Assembly to adopt a redistricting plan¹⁷

[^] An “elector” is defined by Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 143, § 9-12 as every U.S. citizen who is at least 18 years old (individuals who will be 18 either on or before election day can become an elector the day they turn 18), who has applied to, and been approved by, the registrar of voters or the town clerk of the town where they reside.

- If the General Assembly fails to meet the September 15, 2021 deadline, the governor must then appoint a new commission, who will have until November 30, 2021, to submit a redistricting plan to the secretary of the state.
- If this commission fails to meet its deadline, the secretary of the state must notify the chief justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, who will then have until February 15, 2022 to either compel the commission to approve a redistricting plan, or have the Court redraw the legislative district boundaries itself.¹⁸

Q: When does the State of Connecticut receive updated population data from the U.S. Census Bureau?

A: According to federal law, the U.S. Census Bureau must deliver 2020 Census data to the states, for purposes of redistricting, by April 1, 2021.¹⁹ During the last redistricting process, the U.S. Census Bureau delivered Connecticut's 2010 Census data on March 9, 2011.²⁰ However, for the 2020 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau has submitted operational adjustments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which include the delay of delivering redistricting data to the states from April 1 to July 31, 2021.²¹

At the time of publication of this FAQ document, it remains unclear what effect the data delay will have on Connecticut's redistricting process. However, it has been reported states with constitutional redistricting deadlines before July 31, 2021 will be asking the federal government to be prioritized in receiving their data so they may meet their deadlines.²² As a result of this delay, Connecticut's apportionment committee, with its September 15, 2021 constitutional deadline, could lose approximately four months of negotiation time.

Q: What happens if a third political party is elected?

A: The Connecticut Constitution modifies the membership designations of both the reapportionment committee and the gubernatorial-created commission if the General Assembly is made up of members from more than two political parties. In the event a chamber of the General Assembly consists of legislators who, collectively, represent more than two state-recognized political parties, all members who do not caucus with the majority party of the respective chamber collectively select one non-majority party legislator to designate two members of the chamber to the reapportionment committee and the commission in lieu of the minority leader for the chamber automatically being the legislator to designate the two members.²³

Q: Does the General Assembly always complete the redistricting process on time?

A: No, in the most recent redistricting in 2011, the General Assembly was unable to approve a redistricting plan for the state House and Senate until its final constitutional deadline of November 30, 2011, and the legislature was unable to agree on a congressional district redistricting plan altogether.²⁴ The congressional district redistricting process eventually concluded in February 2012 — five months after the General Assembly's final constitutional deadline.²⁵ The Connecticut Supreme Court was forced to grant an extension, which the reapportionment commission did not meet, and, ultimately, directed a special master to draw the congressional district maps that were eventually adopted.²⁶ A similar situation also occurred in 2001.²⁷

Q: How are Connecticut's prison populations counted for the purpose of legislative districts, and what are the ramifications?

A: For the purpose of legislative districts, Connecticut's prison populations are counted as residents of the town where they are incarcerated — not as residents of the town where they are from.²⁸ This policy led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to file a lawsuit²⁹ against the State of Connecticut, arguing how the State counts its prison populations for the purpose of determining legislative districts inflates the voting strength of districts of predominantly White voters.³⁰ However, in April 2020, the NAACP withdrew the suit and intends to either resolve the problem during the upcoming redistricting process or file another suit after the new maps are drawn if the problem is not resolved.³¹

Q: Why doesn't Connecticut use a nonpartisan, independent entity to create its redistricting plan and new legislative district maps?

A: The redistricting process in Connecticut is driven and controlled by the legislative branch and its political leaders as intended in the Connecticut Constitution. However, similar to the concerns about how prison populations are counted, there are concerns about the gerrymandering of Connecticut's legislative districts to provide unfair political advantage to one party.³² Although bills have been raised to compel the legislature to appoint a nonpartisan commission to redraw Connecticut's legislative districts, these bills have not been passed by the General Assembly.³³

Endnotes

- ¹ Sullivan, K. (2018). *Changing Connecticut's Redistricting Process (2018-R-0329)*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Office of Legislative Research. Retrieved from <https://cga.ct.gov/2018/rpt/pdf/2018-R-0329.pdf>.
- ² Conn. Const. art. Third, § 1.
- ³ Conn. Const. art. Third, §§ 3-4, amended by Conn. Const. art. XV §§ 1-2.
- ⁴ U.S. Const. art I, § 3.
- ⁵ Conn. Const. art. Third § 5, amended by Conn. Const. art. XVI § 1.
- ⁶ Sullivan, K. (2018). *Changing Connecticut's Redistricting Process (2018-R-0329)*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Office of Legislative Research. Retrieved from <https://cga.ct.gov/2018/rpt/pdf/2018-R-0329.pdf>.
- ⁷ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXVI and XXX § 2.
- ⁸ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXX § 2.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXVI and XXX § 2.
- ¹¹ Connecticut General Assembly Redistricting Project. (n.d.). 2011 Plans & Maps. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/red2011/maps.asp>.
- ¹² Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXVI.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXX § 2.
- ¹⁷ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXVI.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Pub. L. No. 94-171, 89 Stat. 1023 (1975).
- ²⁰ Connecticut General Assembly Redistricting Project. (n.d.). 2011 Timeline. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/red2011/timeline.asp>.
- ²¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://2020census.gov/content/dam/2020census/materials/news/2020-census%20operational-adjustments-long%20version.pdf>.
- ²² Pazniokas, M. (2020, May 27). Connecticut's redistricting could be squeezed by COVID-19. *The Connecticut Mirror*. Retrieved from <https://ctmirror.org/2020/05/27/connecticuts-redistricting-could-be-squeezed-by-covid-19/>.
- ²³ Conn. Const. art. Third § 6, amended by Conn. Const. art. XXVI and XXX § 2.
- ²⁴ Connecticut General Assembly Redistricting Project. (n.d.). 2011 Timeline. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/red2011/timeline.asp>.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Connecticut General Assembly Redistricting Project. (n.d.). 2001 Archives. Retrieved from https://www.cga.ct.gov/red2011/2001_archives.asp.
- ²⁸ Prison Policy Initiative. (n.d.). Prison Gerrymandering Project: Connecticut. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/connecticut.html>.
- ²⁹ Complaint, *NAACP v. Merrill*, No. 3:18-cv-01094 (D. Conn. June 28, 2018).
- ³⁰ Lo Wang, H., & Devarajan, K. (2019, December 31). 'Your Body Being Used': Where Prisoners Who Can't Vote Fill Voting Districts. *NPR*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/12/31/761932806/your-body-being-used-where-prisoners-who-can-t-vote-fill-voting-districts>.
- ³¹ Associated Press. (2020, April 21). NAACP Withdraws Prison Gerrymandering Lawsuit. *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2020-04-21/naacp-withdraws-prison-gerrymandering-lawsuit>.
- ³² Beals, S.R. (2019, March 25). State, Legal Officials Don't See Gerrymandering As A Big Problem In Connecticut. *CTNewsJunkie*. Retrieved from https://www.ctnewsjunkie.com/archives/entry/20190324_state_legal_officials_dont_see_gerrymandering_as_a_big_problem/.
- ³³ Proposed H.J. No. 58: Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Establish an Independent Nonpartisan Commission for Legislative Redistricting. Gen. Assembly. (Ct. 2019). https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=HJ58&which_year=2019.